

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Jane Doe v. Tea Dating Advice, Inc.

Doe v. Tea Dating Advice · No. 25-cv-06559-TSH · Decided August 6, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California grants Jane Doe permission to proceed under a pseudonym in a putative class action concerning the alleged failure to protect users' private information. The Court concludes that the need to preserve privacy in a sensitive and highly personal matter outweighs the preliminary risk of prejudice to the defendant and that anonymity does not presently impair the public interest in open proceedings.

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6 7
JANE DOE, Case No. 25-cv-06559-TSH 8 Plaintiff, ORDER GRANTING PERMISSION TO 9
v. PROCEED UNDER PSEUDONYM 10 TEA DATING ADVICE, INC., 11 Defendant. 12 13
Plaintiff Jane Doe brings this putative class action against Defendant Tea Dating Advice, 14 Inc.,
alleging it failed to protect class members' private information on its mobile application, Tea 15
Dating Advice, leading to hackers accessing their information, including photos, information from
16 government IDs, and users' posts and chats.

Plaintiff filed this case using a pseudonym "in order 17 [to] protect her identity given the sensitive
nature of this action." Compl. ¶ 10, ECF No. 1. 18 "The normal presumption in litigation is that
parties must use their real names." Doe v. 19 Kamehameha Schools/Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate,
596 F.3d 1036, 1042 (9th Cir. 2010); see 20 also Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a) (requiring that the title of
every complaint "include the names of all the 21 parties").

However, the Ninth Circuit allows parties to use pseudonyms under special 22 circumstances
where nondisclosure of the party's identity is necessary to protect a person from 23 harassment,
injury, ridicule or personal embarrassment.¹ Does I through XXIII v. Advanced 24 25 1 The Ninth
Circuit does not require a plaintiff to obtain leave to proceed anonymously before filing an
anonymous pleading.

See Doe v. UNUM Life Ins. Co. of Am., 164 F. Supp. 3d 1140, 26 1144 (N.D. Cal. 2016) (holding
that a plaintiff is not required to obtain leave to proceed anonymously before filing an anonymous
pleading because any attempt to proceed anonymously 27 would be pointless if a plaintiff had to
use his or her real name first); Doe v. Penzato, 2011 WL 1 Textile, 214 F.3d 1058, 1067-68 (9th
Cir.

2000) (citations omitted). A court must balance the need 2 for anonymity against the risk of prejudice to the opposing party and the public's interest in 3 knowing the party's identity. *Jane Roes 1-2 v. SFBSC Mgmt., LLC*, 77 F. Supp. 3d 990, 993 (N.D. 4 Cal. 2015); *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068. Applying the balancing test, courts have 5 permitted plaintiffs to use pseudonyms in three situations: (1) when identification creates a risk of 6 retaliatory physical or mental harm; (2) when anonymity is necessary to preserve privacy in a 7 matter of sensitive and highly personal nature; and (3) when the anonymous party is compelled to 8 admit his or her intention to engage in illegal conduct.

Jane Roes 1-2, 77 F. Supp. 3d at 993 9 (citing *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068). 10 The Court must determine the precise prejudice at each stage of the proceedings to the 11 opposing party, and whether proceedings may be structured to mitigate that prejudice. *Advanced 12 Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1068.

The Court must also decide whether the public's interest in the case 13 would be best served by requiring that the litigants reveal their identities. *Id.* at 1069. In cases 14 where plaintiff has demonstrated a need for anonymity, the district court should use its powers to 15 manage pretrial proceedings under Rule 16(b) and to issue protective orders limiting disclosure of 16 the party's name under Rule 26(c) "to preserve the party's anonymity to the greatest extent 17 possible without prejudicing the opposing party's ability to litigate the case." *Id.*; *Fed.*

R. Civ. P. 18 16(b) & 26(c). 19 Given the nature of the claims in this case, the Court finds the need of Plaintiff for 20 anonymity outweighs the risk of prejudice to Defendant at this preliminary stage, as Plaintiff has 21 shown anonymity is necessary to preserve privacy in a matter of sensitive and highly personal 22 nature.

The Ninth Circuit has explained that, where a defendant does not know the plaintiff's 23 name, "at some later point in the proceedings it may be necessary to reveal plaintiffs' identities to 24 defendants so that defendants may refute [their] individualized accusations." *Advanced Textile*, 25 214 F.3d at 1058.

Thus, Defendant can later seek disclosure of Plaintiff's true name. See *Doe 1 v. 26 GitHub, Inc.*, 672 F. Supp. 3d 837, 853 (N.D. Cal. 2023) (concluding that defendants would not be 27 prejudiced because "Plaintiffs have disclosed their true names to Defendants subject to a 1 Further, the public interest factor does not weigh against permitting Plaintiff to proceed 2 || pseudonymously. "The normal presumption in litigation... that parties must use their real names 3...

18 loosely related to the public's right to open courts and the right of private individuals to 4 || confront their accusers." *Kamehameha*, 596 F.3d at 1042. Where the plaintiffs' identities are not 5 central to the issues raised by a case, however, the public interest may not be harmed by 6 ||

permitting plaintiffs to proceed pseudonymously. See *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 1072 7 (reversing denial of anonymity where “[t]he district court did not explain, and we fail to see, how 8 || disguising plaintiffs’ identities will obstruct public scrutiny of the important issues in th[e] case”); 9 || *Kamehameha*, 596 F.3d at 1043 (noting that, where plaintiffs brought “claims of widespread 10 discrimination,” “it [wa]s difficult to see ‘how disguising plaintiffs’ identities w[ould] obstruct 11 public scrutiny of the important issues in th[e] case’”) (quoting *Advanced Textile*, 214 F.3d at 12 1072).

There is no indication that withholding Plaintiff’s identity will obstruct public scrutiny of 13 the issues raised, as the identity appears to have no bearing on the central issues of this case, 14 || including whether Defendant failed to safeguard its users’ private information.

Thus, the Court 3 15 finds the public interest factor does not weigh against anonymity at this stage of the litigation. See a 16 *GitHub, Inc.*, 672 F. Supp. 3d at 855 (finding public interest factor weighed in favor of anonymity 3 17 where the plaintiffs’ identities appeared to have no bearing on the resolution of the issues, and S 18 allowing plaintiffs to proceed pseudonymously would not impede public access to the substance of 19 the proceedings); *Doe v. County of El Dorado*, 2013 WL 6230342, at *5 (E.D.

Cal. Dec. 2, 2013) 20 (same).” Accordingly, the Court shall permit Plaintiff to proceed under a pseudonym. 21 IT IS SO ORDERED. 22 Dated: August 6, 2025 23 24 A\.\°4 _ THOMAS S. HIXSON 25 United States Magistrate Judge 26 07?

The Court is mindful that, like the other factors, the public interest in Plaintiff’s identity may change as the suit progresses. See *Doe v. NFL Enters., LLC*, 2017 WL 697420, at *2 (N.D. Cal. 2g || Feb. 22, 2017) (noting that “class members will... have a right to know the identity of their representative in this litigation” in later stages of the case).